STATEMENT OF BRUCE JOHNSON, VICE PRESIDENT OF TERMINAL SERVICES, AND STEVEN ZAIDMAN, VICE PRESIDENT OF TECHNICAL OPERATIONS, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, ON THE FAA'S AGING ATC FACILITIES: INVESTIGATING THE NEED TO IMPROVE FACILITIES AND WORKER CONDITIONS, ON JULY 24, 2007.

Chairman Costello, Congressman Petri, Members of the Subcommittee:

We are pleased to appear before you today to discuss the Federal Aviation Administration's efforts to improve aging air traffic control facilities and the worker conditions at those facilities. My name is Bruce Johnson, and I am the Vice President of Terminal Services in the FAA's Air Traffic Organization. With me today is Steven Zaidman, the ATO's Vice President of Technical Operations. Improving our air traffic control facilities is one of the FAA's greatest challenges, in breadth and in depth, and we appreciate having the opportunity to discuss it with you. We have an extensive multi-tiered program to address our aging facilities, and we look forward to continuing our efforts as we transition to the Next Generation Air Transportation System.

The Challenge

As you know, the current air traffic system is built around 1960s radar technology and is constrained by its limitations. At the time the system was built, each air traffic facility could receive signals from only one radar. That operational limitation required that we build more than 300 air traffic control facilities spread across the country. That number has grown to 526 terminal and en route air traffic control facilities across the country. Out of these, the FAA has responsibility for replacing and transitioning over 400 to

NextGen. Additionally, FAA is responsible for maintaining more than 9,000 smaller buildings and 13,000 structural towers associated with navigational aids, radars, and other components of the ATC infrastructure. Our airspace is also divided into artificial boundaries based on the limits of legacy radar technology.

Today, radar and air traffic control automation technology permits individual facilities to handle up to 16 radars. In the meantime, as we replace and transform these facilities, we still need to sustain them, that is, performing maintenance and repair where needed and bringing the facilities up to building code, where applicable.

In 1999, the FAA began assessing our terminal facilities, which include Airport Traffic Control Towers and Terminal Radar Approach Control facilities (TRACON), to collect information about the condition of the facility and the costs associated with maintaining the facility. In addition, we have a facility planning process in place that methodically analyzes each facility for potential modernization, including replacement. As part of this planning process, we include a facility life-cycle model that will better enable us to predict the maintenance and repair costs of each facility, as it undergoes modernization or replacement. Finally, our long range plans under our airspace redesign efforts include potential facility consolidation, which will result in better service to air travelers, better work environments for our controllers, and lower costs to the taxpayer.

Sustaining Current Facilities

As both our en route and terminal facilities age, we strive to get the most mileage out of them. We collect and review our maintenance and repair needs annually in order to budget appropriately for them. Once we identify what is needed, we prioritize our needs – maintenance and repairs impacting safety, as always, are our first priority, followed by waterproofing, HVAC and electrical issues, and on down the line. High priority needs, such as a leaking roof or an air conditioner outage during the summer, are addressed immediately while lower priority needs, such as new paint and carpet, are planned through the normal budget cycle.

Additionally, we are striving to be more proactive in our approach to maintenance and repairs. We have developed our processes to identify and process maintenance and repair issues as they arise. When a critical need that immediately affects operation arises, we reprioritize our maintenance and repair schedule as needed to address it. We recognize that we have a backlog of maintenance and repair, and we are taking steps to reduce that backlog. We have completed condition assessments for various facility types to determine what repairs are needed and how to budget for them. We have also developed systems to ensure that the highest priority backlog items are addressed first. I am pleased to report that we are making headway on the backlog and will continue to do so over the coming years. Finally, as we transition into NextGen, we are developing individual facility life-cycle plans, which will allow us to be more proactive in planning for sustaining our facilities over their lifespans.

Replacing Facilities

It is an unfortunate fact that some of our facilities have aged to the point where the responsible thing to do is replace them. We have facilities in our system that have so many issues that to repair and remediate them indefinitely would be financially unsound. We certainly appreciate that replacing an air traffic control facility is a major financial investment. Thus, the FAA has set out criteria for facilities replacement that are intended to ensure that resources are allocated responsibly.

First, we are only replacing facilities that have a solid business case and meet fixed requirements. When we identify a tower deficiency, we examine all of the options for addressing the issues. In some cases, we determine that it is a better long-term solution, technologically and financially, to replace the facility. In others, we have found that a complete replacement is unnecessary, and that we are able to update the facility sufficiently. Thus far, 13 new sites have been commissioned from FY 2005 – FY 2006, and we have 12 sites that we plan to commission between FY 2007 – FY 2008.

Transition to NextGen

As you all know, today's aviation system is operating at full capacity, making our transition to NextGen an absolute necessity. As we maintain our current facilities to make the most of them, and replace them when needed, we are simultaneously working to transition facilities into NextGen by identifying where and when new technologies and equipment can be put into place. For instance, at the Morristown, New Jersey facility, the FAA made the business decision to modernize instead of replace. That modernization effort is currently in the design phase and scheduled to be complete in Spring 2008.

Consolidation

A key element of the FAA's transformation into NextGen is consolidation of our facilities. The number and specific locations of many existing FAA facilities were determined by the capabilities and limitations of 1960's technology. In the subsequent four decades, the available technology has vastly improved, rendering the long-existing pattern of FAA facilities no longer the best configuration. Without consolidation, the FAA is tied to maintaining outdated facilities with outdated technology based on outdated 1960's radar boundaries. Further, consolidation lowers infrastructure costs, and helps improve safety and efficiency by making new technologies available for controllers. These savings and improvements mean fewer air traffic delays and lower costs for air travelers.

The FAA has proven that we can consolidate both airspace and facilities, improving the safety of flight while at the same time saving money. For example, in 2002, the FAA consolidated the airspace control that was formerly managed by five separate airports in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area into one brand new facility – called the Potomac Terminal Approach Control. Now instead of having five compartments of airspace, the FAA has a large geographic area in which the airspace was redesigned to improve the safety of operations and provide more direct routes for aircraft. This consolidation has the additional benefit of allowing aircraft to fly at higher altitudes longer, reducing fuel consumption and the incumbent noise impacts created with low-level flight. The Baltimore-Washington airspace consolidation has been extremely

successful, saving millions of dollars in fuel, reducing carbon emissions, reducing noise exposure and reducing delays. Facilities and airspace consolidations in New York, Atlanta, Northern California and Southern California have seen similar results.

However, despite proven success, a provision in this Committee's aviation reauthorization proposal, H.R. 2881, would impose a moratorium on any FAA's consolidation plans and prohibit FAA from managing our assets. Section 807 of H.R. 2881 would require the FAA to submit a report on our consolidation efforts, but would also allow delay tactics by communities that could postpone any consolidation efforts virtually indefinitely.

We recognize that consolidation is a highly emotional and sensitive issue, which is why the Administration proposed a process where objective recommendations would be made regarding which facilities to close, public input would be considered, Presidential review would be required, and, ultimately, congressional action would be necessary. The provision was included in the FAA's reauthorization proposal to augment the FAA's current consolidation authority to include an open, public process where all concerned parties may have their say. We believe this approach is the fairest way for the FAA to make objective, informed decisions about facility consolidation.

Not only does H.R. 2881 not include this comprehensive approach, but it would take a step backwards. If the House provision is enacted, with its moratorium on facility closure and the decisionmaking delays it allows, the FAA would be tied to continuing to maintain

outdated facilities with outdated technology. Our transition to NextGen would be at risk, and the result would be aviation gridlock.

The development and deployment of NextGen, by its very nature, will be a complex, challenging, and expensive technological endeavor. It will entail a total system reengineering of our airspace and air traffic control systems without the luxury of slowing down or interrupting the growing volumes of air traffic that we see each and every day. A provision such as section 807 that limits, or removes entirely, our discretion to determine how best to transition to NextGen according to objective safety, efficiency, and economic considerations will greatly hamper, or entirely halt, this important initiative. The Administration's proposal is what is needed to help us move effectively toward NextGen, and we strongly urge Congress to adopt our approach.

While we recognize that there may be disruption to a few individuals and communities with the consolidation of facilities, it is simply unrealistic to expect that a major overhaul of the nation's air traffic control system will not result in some growing pains. At every phase, we are taking steps to minimize worker disruption and ensure smooth transitions wherever possible. In the case of the recent Palm Springs consolidation, we did not require anyone to relocate. In those cases where relocation is unavoidable, workers will be offered a fully paid move and notified well in advance of the transition. In addition, the FAA will provide appropriate training and orientation at the new facility to further ensure success.

In fact, worker conditions are always a major concern. Maintenance and repairs, replacement of facilities, and transitioning to NextGen are all conducted with worker conditions in mind. We have several procedures in place to protect worker safety as construction projects get underway. Replacing facilities and NextGen technologies are primarily designed with the worker environment in mind, to make our controllers' jobs more streamlined and efficient and provide them a safe and comfortable working environment.

Conclusion

FAA's transition to NextGen is a lengthy, phased process, and until we achieve our final goals, we are committed to working on remedies available to us, whether that entails further maintenance and repairs or replacement of a facility. Our multi-level approach to maintaining, improving, and replacing our aging facilities is designed to get us to NextGen without any compromise in safety and with maximum levels of efficiency. But, time is of the essence here, and we urge the Committee not to tie our hands with regard to facilities consolidation.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes our testimony. We thank you, Congressman Petri, and the Members of the Subcommittee once again for inviting us to testify today. We would happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.